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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NEA/IPA FOR
GOLDBERGER/HOLMSTROM/ROSENSTOCK/PECCIA; NSC FOR
ABRAMS/SINGH/PASCUAL; JCS FOR GENERAL SELVA

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TAGS: PGOV PREL IS KPAL KWBG

SUBJECT: DOV WEISSGLAS WARNS ISRAEL'S SETTLEMENT POLICY
COULD STRAIN RELATIONS WITH THE US.

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Luis G. Moreno for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (U) Summary: Former Chief of Staff to Ariel Sharon Dov Weissglas, in an op-ed published in the mass circulation Yediot Aharonot November 24, cautioned that Israel risks a diplomatic confrontation with the new US Administration if it continues to permit settlement expansion and outpost construction. Weissglas also warned that Israel could jeopardize US recognition of Israel's control of the major settlement blocs if Israel does not adhere to its obligations under the Roadmap. Weissglas added that Israel's current settlement policy could hurt Israel's relations with the next US administration, which he opines will not be as patient as its predecessor. End Summary.

SETTLEMENT CONSTRUCTION RISKS DAMAGING US RELATIONS

¶2. (U) Yediot Aharonot published an op-ed column by former Chief of Staff to PM Sharon Dov Weissglas on November 24, in which Weissglas commented that the US has become increasingly frustrated with the GOI's inability to meet its commitments to freeze settlement construction and dismantle outposts, and warned that Israel could become entangled in a "severe diplomatic crisis" with the US if it continues to shirk its Roadmap obligations. Brdg. Gen. Baruch Spiegel, a consultant for the Economic Cooperation Foundation, on November 25 relayed similar comments from Defense Minister Barak and IDF Chief of Staff Ashkenazi to Charge d'Affairs Moreno that the GOI needs to uphold its Roadmap commitments to avoid damaging Israel's relationship with the US.

¶3. (U) Weissglas, who wrote the GOI response to President Bush's April 2004 letter to Sharon, also warned that such a crisis could prompt the US to re-assess its recognition of Israel's claims to the major settlement blocs. He wrote that President Bush in 2004 recognized Israeli claims to the major settlement blocs with the understanding that the remaining portions of the West Bank would be reserved for a Palestinian state. Weissglas commented that continued settlement expansion and construction of outposts that "change the facts on the ground" could affect the tenets of the agreement, and US support for Israel's claims.

NEW ADMINISTRATION TO KEEP UP PRESSURE

¶4. (U) Weissglas noted that Israel risks compromising the US's trust and damaging relations with the next US Administration by continuing to balk on its Roadmap obligations. He predicted that the Obama Administration will not be as lenient with Israel as the Bush Administration, and

will immediately demand that Israel uphold its Roadmap commitments. Weissglas warned that Israel risks getting off on the wrong foot with the new administration by dragging its feet on its Roadmap commitments.

COMMENT

15. (C) Weissglas's commentary comes on the heels of public statements earlier this month by Prime Minister Olmert, who said that settlements and outposts represent an impediment to the two-state solution. Both men in the past supported settlement expansion, but their views have evolved. Olmert appears to genuinely believe that settlement growth is hindering the peace process, while Weissglas' emphasis is on the potential damage to the U.S.-Israeli relationship that he believes is essential to Israel's survival as a Jewish state.

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MORENO